

COASTAL SERVICES

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LINKING PEOPLE, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY

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Recycling Shrink-Wrap from Boats in Ohio

One of the cheapest ways to protect a boat stored outside during harsh winter months is to shrink-wrap it in plastic. The problem comes in the spring when the plastic is removed and ends up in a landfill.

Plastic coming off one boat weighs between 35 to 50 pounds, and marinas along Lake Erie may have 12 to 200 boats shedding their plastic skins at once. "We're talking a lot of shrink-wrap," says Gary Comer, Jr., extension educator for the Ohio Sea Grant College Program.

That much plastic would take up the same space as burying nine school buses in a landfill.

To keep the plastic out of Ohio landfills, Comer, who coordinates the Ohio Clean Marinas Program, partnered with Mondo Polymer Technologies to start a boat shrink-wrap recycling program.

In the past two years, the program has recycled 230 tons of shrink-wrap into 37,857 highway guardrail blocks. That much plastic would take up the same space as burying nine school buses in a landfill, or would be enough to

cover the entire 312 miles of Lake Erie's coastline with an 8.6-foot wide strip of plastic.

"It's been a win-win-win for everybody," Comer says. "Marinas don't have to pay for disposal, boat owners don't have to haul it home to dispose of it or pay a fee, and a service provider gets raw product."

Comer piloted the program in 2006 in three counties working with 70 marinas. Marina operators told Comer they would be willing to participate if the plastic were removed regularly and didn't require any additional expense, and if operators didn't have to remove banding, sort by color, or try to keep it excessively clean.

In April 2006, Mondo began collecting shrink-wrap from marinas each week using a company-provided and -manned compactor-style garbage truck with the Clean Marina's logo painted on the side. A brochure was developed to educate the boaters about the program.

By the end of the first season, over 100,000 pounds of shrink-wrap was recycled. The savings for the marinas was \$28,000.

In 2007, the program was expanded along the entire Ohio

Lake Erie coast and included 102 marinas. To make collection and communication easier, Comer took Global Positioning System points at all the marinas and mapped them using a geographic information system.

By the end of the season, 300,000 pounds of boat shrink-wrap had been recycled. Additionally, 50 tons of plastic from greenhouses and boat shows was collected.

Comer says the program would easily transfer to other states, noting that a pilot program between Mondo and Michigan Sea Grant was implemented last year, and that the company has been talking to other states.

"It's been a home run as far as I'm concerned," Comer says. "I feel good about it as someone with an environmental conscience, and it's helped me build rapport and trust with marina operators. This has been truly successful." ♦

For more information about the Ohio shrink-wrap recycling program, visit www.ohioseagrant.osu.edu/cleanmarinas/. You may also contact Gary Comer at (419) 609-4120, or comer.29@osu.edu.



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